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## Introduction: Schiller and the German Novella

*Jeffrey L. High*

THE LITERARY PROSE WORKS of Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), some among the most resonant works in his time, remain today a largely overlooked area of his oeuvre and an unrecognized link in the evolution of German short prose. Until the 1780s, the moral tale, the historical anecdote, and the nascent German Boccaccio-Cervantes-novella of Christoph Martin Wieland (“Werkchen”)<sup>1</sup> were the dominant German forms of short prose in number and in theoretical prominence.<sup>2</sup> Written almost entirely in his first decade as a published author, Schiller’s prose works, which experiment with the same dark anthropological curiosity and moral confusion that made his first drama *Die Räuber* (1781, *The Robbers*) a sensation, mark a departure from the uncomplicated moral praise or condemnation of the moral tale, the singularly characteristic anecdote, and the frivolity of the Boccaccio-Cervantes novella, to the moral ambivalence, anthropological universality, and the grim verisimilitude of what was to become the German novella.<sup>3</sup> In so doing, Schiller provided his own prose fiction with an original artistry and profile, and provided subsequent German short-prose authors with a model that makes his literary prose works significant for the literary-historical consideration of scholars and students over 200 years after his death in 1805 and on the eve of his 250th birthday in 2009. In this volume, seven of Schiller’s literary prose works appear in new translations, together with five scholarly essays, in the only English collection currently in print. These include one each on the two more prominent original prose works and the Diderot adaptation, as well as one essay on the more historical-anecdotal moral tales.

Given his relatively limited production, the importance of Schiller’s prose works for the history of the German novella is remarkable, and his influence singular, even if his works remain a largely unrecognized link in the academic reception of the evolution of German short prose. That both August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel named Boccaccio, Cervantes, Goethe, and even Shakespeare as the models for the (German) novella without mentioning Schiller is not surprising when one considers the resentment toward Schiller after he dismissed A. W. Schlegel from his position as contributor to

Schiller's journal *Die Horen* (The Horae) in May of 1797.<sup>4</sup> Of course, the Schlegels could also not yet know in the late 1790s that it would not be the grand panoramic frame-novella<sup>5</sup> cycle of amusing human foibles (Boccaccio, Cervantes, Wieland) that would inform the German novella from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the twenty-first, but rather, and on the contrary, its isolated, impatient, laser-focused, and not at all playful offspring — Schiller's inevitable narrative chain of the unexpected collision (chance) of exemplary susceptible character (human nature) plausible, extreme situation, and reaction, with the gravest of consequences (fate).<sup>6</sup>

One of the important histories of the German novella, Johannes Klein's *Geschichte der deutschen Novelle von Goethe bis zur Gegenwart* (History of the German Novella from Goethe to the Present),<sup>7</sup> inadvertently points out the relative critical silence toward Schiller's prose, and the lack of sufficient and accepted academic terminology appears to play an important role. Faced with a scholarly tradition that agreed that there is a clear dividing line between pre-Goethean short prose and the tradition of the German Boccaccio novella that began with Wieland, Schiller's novella "Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre" (The Criminal of Lost Honor), though indeed discussed, appears at the beginning of "Part One: Goethe," under the subtitle "Prologue Schiller: *Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre . . .*" (Klein ix). The implication is clear: There were by definition no serious German novellas prior to the age-of-novella theory that dawned in the mid-1790s with August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel's theoretical essays and Goethe's works and contributions to the definition.<sup>8</sup> In "Part Two: Heinrich von Kleist," Klein repositioned Schiller's "Verbrecher" as heralding the "breakthrough of the [German] novella."<sup>9</sup> Gerhard Kaiser later called "Verbrecher" the "bridge between morality tale and novella."<sup>10</sup> Finally, in 1982, Gerhard Neumann articulated Schiller's place at "the beginning of the German novella."<sup>11</sup> By 1999, Hugo Aust situated his unit titled "Schiller" — the first unit to bear the name of a German author — in the chapter "Geschichte der deutschen Novelle" (History of the German Novella), between units on "Aufklärung" (Enlightenment) and "Das Aufkommen der Novellenbezeichnung" (The Rise of the Category Novella) (Aust 55–65). Most recently, Katherine Astbury further corroborated Schiller's role in the evolution from the moral tale to the German novella.<sup>12</sup>

Causing such a literary-historical problem is one of Schiller's most interesting distinctions. Too morally and politically complicated, unwilling — if not incapable — of complying with the prevailing German prose conventions of the Boccaccio novella, the morality tale, or the exemplary anecdote, Schiller's short prose works transformed the specifically German novella through the device of "truth" — socio-historical and psychological plausibility — resulting in riveting tales driven by biographical study, environmental psychology, and psychological profiling that examine rather

than portray fate.<sup>13</sup> In his literary prose works more evidently than elsewhere, Schiller, who received his medical doctorate in 1780 at the age of twenty-one, demonstrates his fascination with the psychological-causal mechanisms of humankind in the scientific analysis of credible and almost exclusively actual occurrences — “realism and truth”<sup>14</sup> — which become a common feature of all of his original literary prose works, as well as the two prose adaptations.

The number of characteristics that later informed the canonized definition of the German novella present in Schiller’s works is large, and the fact that many of them are defined explicitly in his theoretical introductions only makes their influence more evident. The transformation of the German novella — most often attributed to Goethe — from the “attraction of novelty” and the mere “playfulness of Boccaccio,” “who immorally enjoys the life” of moral stupidity he observes (Klein 34), is self-evident in Schiller’s serious short prose. Schiller analyzes, exposes, and criticizes individuals and society in moral crisis. The refinement of the “character and fate novella” (Klein 34), most often associated with Goethe, is the rule in Schiller’s short prose works, all of which predate those by Goethe. The portrayal of the “confusion of feelings” often identified with Goethe’s later prose works and with Kleist,<sup>15</sup> and Kleist’s repetition and variation of events and motifs, are already genre-defining characteristics of Schiller’s prose. The combination of the analytical empiricism of the narrators, the “unheard-of event,” and the “amazing” (Klein 34) — later associated with Goethe and the post-Schillerian German Romantics — is characteristic of all of Schiller’s earlier prose works.

Tellingly, Schiller’s influence on the characteristic form and content of the German novella is evident in the works of subsequent German authors of short prose works. There can be no doubt that the canonized novellas of Kleist, the later novellas of Ludwig Tieck, Achim von Arnim, and Clemens Brentano, which were often inspired by remarkable newspaper stories<sup>16</sup> are closer first to the roots of Schiller’s short prose, and then to Goethe’s early novellas, than to Goethe’s romantic-mythological *Novelle*, the work, ironically, most frequently cited as genre-defining.<sup>17</sup> Kleist for his part was indifferent to the term novella when he organized his collection of them in 1810 and proposed the title “Moralische Erzählungen von Heinrich von Kleist” (Moral Tales by Heinrich von Kleist).<sup>18</sup> However, Kleist’s novellas mirror Schiller’s not only in content and style, but foremost, in stark contrast to the German moral tale tradition, in the absence of any secure hope of reward for virtuous behavior.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, just when redemption seems near, it simply fails to show up and life — individual and situation — either indifferently goes on or, most often, ends. Schiller’s prose prefigures the most prominent post-Goethean novella conventions: Tieck’s “turning point,” A. W. Schlegel’s “turning points,” Paul Heyses contributions of the “silhouette,” Boccaccio’s “falcon,” and investigation of the “deepest moral

questions,” Theodor Storm’s “sister of the drama” and “unity of form,” Benno von Wiese’s “pictorial and symbolic” portrayal and the “role of chance,” and Frank Ryder’s “non-linear narration.”<sup>20</sup> The same can be argued for a large number of other novella conventions that contribute to the “family resemblance” of the genre,<sup>21</sup> from the common rhythm and summary nature of the titles and subtitles (subject-preposition-object, as in “Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre”) to the practice of artificially reinforcing the historical urgency of the tale by disguising names and places through omission. No doubt, there are older isolated examples of each of these authorial strategies, particularly in Wieland’s earlier, mostly humorous, short prose works; however, there are no prominent German prose works prior to Schiller’s that demonstrate the formal and thematic consistency in so many of the aforementioned novella conventions.

From Schiller’s Marquis von A\*\*\* in “Ein merkwürdiges Beispiel” and Prinz von \*\*\* and Count von O\*\* in his *Der Geisterseher* to Kleist’s “Marquise von O” (1808); from Schiller’s *Spiritualist* to E. T. A. Hoffmann’s in “Der Sandmann” (The Sandman, 1816);<sup>22</sup> from the Venice of Schiller’s Prince von \*\*\* and Count von O\*\* to Gustav von Aschenbach’s Venice in Thomas Mann’s *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912, Death in Venice);<sup>23</sup> from eighteenth-century writers to Heinrich von Kleist, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Robert Musil, Thomas Mann, and Alfred Döblin,<sup>24</sup> Schiller’s short prose works fairly hum in the background of two centuries of the most celebrated German short prose works. Indeed, the number of prominent writers of novellas he inspired might in part explain why Schiller’s fascination with moral ambiguity, crime, and conspiracy, his dramatic changes of narrative perspective, and his tales appear so modern after over two hundred years.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Citing Boccaccio and Cervantes, Wieland’s description of the novella as a “little work” (Werkchen) in 1772 is indicative of the light tone characteristic of his own novellas and of the novella tradition prior to Schiller. Introduction to *Don Sylvio von Rosalva*, in Christoph Martin Wieland, *Wielands Werke*, XIV. Theil (Berlin: Gustav Hempel, 1879), 167–68.

<sup>2</sup> Wieland’s *Don Sylvio von Rosalva* (1764) comprises a series of novellas in the tradition of Boccaccio and Cervantes that delight in the parodistic exposure of moral stupidity. Although Wieland’s first and subsequent collections of novellas are treated extensively in secondary literature on the German novella, they have little to do with the serious German novella from Schiller on, and have much more in common with the German fairy tale. Similarly, Goethe’s *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*

is often considered the beginning of the German novella, but was published in 1795 and thus years after Schiller's short prose works.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Silz, "Geschichte, Theorie und Kunst der Deutschen Novelle," in *Der Deutschunterricht* 11, 5 (1959): 82–100, here 86. For a review of the history and characteristics of the specifically German novella, see Frank Ryder, *Die Novelle* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), xviii–xxvi. Subsequent citations as "Ryder" with page number.

<sup>4</sup> See Schiller's letter to August Wilhelm Schlegel of 31 May 1797. *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*, ed. Julius Petersen et al. (Weimar: Herrman Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1943ff.), 29:80. Subsequent citations as "NA" with volume and page number.

<sup>5</sup> Hugo Aust, *Novelle* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1999), 15. Subsequent citations as "Aust" with page number.

<sup>6</sup> In 1804, August Wilhelm Schlegel does recognize that the novella commonly describes "Erfahrung von wirklich geschehenen Dingen" (things that actually happened); however, this statement is rarely true of canonical novellas prior to Schiller's short prose works and appears after Schiller's short prose career is over. August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst. III Teil: Geschichte der romantischen Literatur*. Cited as in Bernhard Seuffert, *Deutsche Literaturdenkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, volume 19 (Heilbronn: Henninger, 1884), 242–43.

<sup>7</sup> Johannes Klein, *Geschichte der deutschen Novelle von Goethe bis zur Gegenwart* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1956). Subsequent citations as "Klein" with page number.

<sup>8</sup> For a summary of the Schlegels' contributions to the theory of the novella, see Karl Konrad Polheim, ed., *Theorie und Kritik der deutschen Novelle von Wieland bis Musil* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1970), 3–20.

<sup>9</sup> "Durchbruch der Novelle," Klein 51.

<sup>10</sup> Gerhard Kaiser, *Von Arkadien nach Elysium. Schiller-Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 45–58, here 58. See Helmut Koopmann, ed., *Schiller Handbuch* (Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1998), 704.

<sup>11</sup> Gerhard Neumann, "Die Anfänge deutscher Novellistik. 'Schillers Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre' — Goethes 'Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten,'" in: *Unser commercium. Goethes und Schillers Literaturpolitik* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1984), 433–60.

<sup>12</sup> Katherine Astbury, *The Moral Tale in France and Germany 1750–1789* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2002), 170–73.

<sup>13</sup> Helmut Koopmann, *Friedrich Schiller I: 1759–1794* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1966), 66.

<sup>14</sup> *Der Verbrecher aus verlorener Ehre und andere Erzählungen*, mit einem Nachwort von Bernhard Zeller (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1964), 51.

<sup>15</sup> "Verwirrung des Gefühls," Klein 34.

<sup>16</sup> Fritz Strich, *Deutsche Klassik und Romantik* (Bern: Francke, 1962), 152–53.

<sup>17</sup> Note that in Goethe's "Die wunderlichen Nachbarskinder" (The Strange Neighbor Children) in *Wahlverwandtschaften* (1808, Elective Affinities), and "Der Mann von funfzig Jahren" (The Man of Fifty Years) in *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1807–8,

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